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THE CITIZENS' RELATION TO THE COURSE OF STUDY

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The last decade has brought many changes in public-school curricula. Formerly such curricula were narrow; now they are broad. They used to provide for a few subjects and for a limited experience; now they include many subjects and broader educative opportunities. They used to provide mainly problems appealing to intellectual ability; now they are so varied as to be adapted to all types of learning—intellectual, emotional, motor.

Not only are curricula broader and richer in the opportunities which they offer for the education of children, but they are definitely built to develop socially efficient citizens. A few years ago there was little concern with reference to the values of the content of curricula. The main consideration was that what was prescribed should be reasonably comprehensive. Now each included body of subject-matter or experience is determined in the light of its social value.

The improvement of curricula has been brought about by the adoption of a better technique of determining and developing curricula and the subject-matter values in the various fields of human knowledge. Formerly few participated in the determination of subject-matter content; now curricula are improved to the extent to which constructive criticisms from all points of view are focused upon them during their making. Once the superintendent of schools alone determined the subjects to be taught in the public schools and the content of each from grade to grade. Now pupils, teachers, supervisors, superintendent, and community contribute.

The purpose of this discussion is to emphasize and illustrate the values arising from the participation of intelligent, interested

citizens in the making of the course of study. The values to be emphasized are of two sorts: first, those appearing in the course of study itself and, second, those arising from the more intimate and correct understanding of the course of study which comes to the community through the participation of interested citizens in the work of making the course of study.

It was with the foregoing considerations in mind that the general committee of the Berkeley elementary schools decided to make the mimeographed outlines in use in the various subjects the basis for a series of conferences with groups of intelligent citizens. This general committee, composed of the chairmen of the various subject committees and made up largely of principals and supervisors with many community relationships, was in a position to suggest a desirable personnel for the consideration of each subject from both the standpoint of the service each could render in improving the course and the need on the part of some citizens of first-hand information concerning the work on the course of study which the schools were doing.

After a preliminary survey and discussion of all of the factors to be considered the committee decided upon certain policies to be carried out with reference to the selection of those who were to be invited to the conferences. These were as follows: to select a different group of citizens for each subject, in order to distribute this helpful contact among as large a number as possible; to have represented as many civic, social, and educational organizations and types of business as possible; and to invite to any specific subject conference individuals who, through their occupations or avocational interests, were particularly qualified to be of definite or expert help in relation to that subject. How these policies were carried out will be illustrated by reference to the activities of committees of citizens who aided in criticizing the tentative courses in arithmetic, geography, and nature-study.

Arithmetic.—The citizens' committee was made up of the proprietor of a large dry-goods store, the state commissioner of elementary education, a dentist, the cashier in a local bank, the head bookkeeper in another local bank, the head of a bonding firm, a manufacturer, a dealer in building supplies, and the head of a large real estate firm.

Geography.—The citizens' committee consisted of the secretary of the chamber of commerce, the head of a large advertising firm, the head of a large public-service corporation, the director of a private school, and the head of a large clothing establishment.

Nature-study.—This committee of citizens consisted of the director of the city parks, the head of the park board, a university professor of biology, the director of science and nature-study in a neighboring city school system, and a successful florist.

In connection with this plan for selecting participants in the conferences it seemed advisable to agree upon an approach to these citizens and a mode of procedure in meetings that would guarantee, first, their presence and, second, their interest in and enjoyment of the discussions. Past experience and a knowledge of the layman's usual reluctance to try to be of service in a field toward which he is indifferent or which he considers a matter for the attention of experts led the committee to consider these problems carefully.

Invitations were not sent as formal communications, but each citizen was called upon personally by the superintendent, the chairman of the general committee, or the particular subject chairman whose outline was to be discussed. He was told of the purpose of the meeting and given the names of the other citizens to be included. A complete outline of the work was placed in his hands, and he was told how it had been developed by teachers as a part of the whole co-operative course of study program. He was asked to read it and was urged to attend the conference whether or not he wished to speak.

By giving personal attention and time in this way it was possible to convince even the busiest of business men and women of the sincere desire of the committee to get the reactions of patrons, and to show them the value of this opportunity to devote some time in a constructive way to bettering their schools. No one failed to respond without a reason which was obviously not an excuse. Care was taken to limit each group to a size which would encourage informal discussion and put at ease those who might feel strangely foreign in this pedagogical atmosphere.

The school people did not attempt any defense in case of adverse criticism even if this criticism was unsound in the light of

modern psychology. Suggestions were taken for what they were worth. This did not prevent the wholesome discussion of various points of view, but it did obviate argument and eliminate the possibility of committees being forced to appear to be on the defensive. While it is impossible to give the complete stenographic reports of these conferences, a few quotations will serve to illustrate their tone and the main values derived from them.

In the preliminary remarks of almost every citizen who spoke was an appreciation of the time and thought which had been given by committees to the formulation of the courses. In several instances the reading of the manuscripts had evidently been a revelation as to the philosophy and plan upon which the daily lessons of children are based. These expressions on the part of capable patrons meant much to the committees. Following are a few quotations in brief taken from the complete reports of the various conferences:

I am glad to have the opportunity to speak. In the first place, I want to say to those who have planned this that you have put a tremendous lot of work on it.

It is good, and there is no question but that all this is valuable work and the teachers of Berkeley are to be commended.

I want to congratulate the teachers who have worked this out. The impression I get is that this is a very vital piece of constructive work along the lines we need.

I like the thought all through this course of study—the wonderful chance it gives children for future development, eliminating unnecessary things, emphasizing necessary ones, bringing out wonderful things in children—kindness to animals, etc. We didn't once get these things in school.

So much are the impressions of an outsider. The course of study seems wonderful to me—it looks good.

I want to say I think this is a wonderful scheme.

One of the busiest men of affairs made the following admission:

I expected to come here without reading this course, but I have read every word of it with great interest. I am particularly pleased

I want to say that I think this is a wonderful scheme. One thing I appreciate is the accuracy which is insisted upon. Inaccuracy is one of the main faults business men find today. There is only about one stenographer in ten

whom you can work into your bookkeeping department, even though they have taken the course. During the war bookkeepers were almost impossible to get, even though you trebled their salaries. Everyone has trouble in the bookkeeping department. It means that in most cases the employer has to go down nights and straighten out the errors. It seems to me that this course will solve the problem. If people know how to figure interest, etc., it will save them a great deal financially. Most of the loan offices in San Francisco get from 20 to 25 per cent interest, but the way they explain it to the customer is that they are only charging 8 per cent. I think you have a wonderful scheme and believe it will stir up tremendous enthusiasm for arithmetic. Just another thing—I think the graph proposition of illustrating different problems by lines, etc., is good. If salesmen today could work that out, they could double their sales. A great many people refuse to buy without facts and figures, and by the time the average salesman tries to figure it out the customer has changed his mind.

Citizens in a number of instances were able to correct technical inaccuracies and to supplement the many specific helps with which the committees had sought to enrich the course. The following are typical suggestions on the nature-study course:

I believe that we haven't made quite the use of California authors that we should. I believe that I could help out with the names of books. Harry Wm. Meyer's *The Bird Convention* deals with California birds wholly. The second- or third-grade teacher might read this to her classes or let them read it themselves. It gives personality to birds which always appeals to little folks.

On the subject of four-footed mammals the best thing is the book by Nelson published by the National Geographic Society. It is full of colored pictures with interesting write-ups about every four-footed animal among the American mammals.

One by Steven, about California mammals, is over the heads of children but is very good for teachers to use in finding out the habits of the bear, ground-squirrel, etc.

Boys here in Berkeley by the time they are twelve years old are all crazy to own a rifle, either an air gun or, preferably, a twenty-two. The first thing they do is to go back into the hills and shoot at our common song birds. The very ripest time to hit the school children with information about the protective laws is about the time they wish to go out to shoot birds. This time seems to be at the age of about twelve years—the high sixth or low seventh grade.

As to technical inaccuracies, the following suggestions were offered:

A thing that I notice in the beginning—something to guard against—is this "insects and animals." Insects *are* animals. This would lead children to

believe that insects are not animals whereas they are. Yesterday it was my pleasure to travel with a little four-year-old by my side. His observations, as he pointed out the anise, where the caterpillars grow, and the peach trees, etc., were perfectly fine. He had been doing some observing for himself, and he knew how to distinguish between the kinds of trees, etc. We should be very careful in dealing with these little fellows as to what impressions we leave.

In looking over your course I am wondering whether, after all, the vocational side has not been overemphasized. A little overemphasis on agriculture and gardening—that is one reaction of mine.

I agree with Mr. —— on the economic point. There is an overemphasis of the dollars and cents attitude—vocational education. We ought to get away from that point of view—teach that there is something more than earning a living. A child should be taught that he must *serve*—help his community; leave far in the background the idea of simply learning something by which he can make some money and earn a living. Instead of the talk about the money taken in by raising vegetables, could we not emphasize simply the joy of accomplishment; for instance, “look what splendid returns we have received—how beautifully they have grown. See the meadow lark, how he sits on the post and sings”—not that he destroys a certain amount of grain per year. We should appreciate the meadow lark for making the out of doors interesting. Teach us how to live better our own lives.

These two main points can still stand emphasizing to a greater extent—field trips to develop the powers of observation and getting away from the dollars and cents or vocational side of training. Teach that there is something more in life than simply learning how to do things to make a living.

A large percentage of parents are believers in formal discipline. Many parents do not know of the educational movement to acquaint even elementary children with vocational materials and fields.

I most cordially indorse what Mr. —— and Mr. —— have said. I believe every word of it. There are some very subtle, important points that in the drift of the educational system we are overlooking. Is it leading us only to practical results? The great philosophers and scientists all came from Europe. They are all English, German, and French—they are not American. The reason is because we have so emphasized the practical side. In teaching nature-study in your schools you ought to be planting germs of things which will grow into wholesome things of life, and the mystery, prophecy, etc., of this world in which we live. This can be done with a five-year-old. He can learn the difference between creation and evolution. These facts are useful but they must have organization. We haven't touched the basic thing

which ties them together. Get the child's curiosity aroused that he may some day add to the sum total of human knowledge. The most practical things in this world are the ideal things. If we could get schools to realize this! Mere facts of life lead us on to mystery and wonder of the goal of life.

My points are, then, (1) leading the child to the soil to bring out the relation of living forms; (2) emphasis on the scientific side, to lead on to more knowledge; and (3) the aesthetic side—the appreciation of nature as related to art. So often the artists of today go to the old Greek and Gothic figures for designs for our buildings here instead of making use of the many beautiful things in nature around us. Art schools in Japan have their children study nature in art. The art of Japan is not based upon formalism, convention, but on nature-study.

There are many boys here in this town who have taken examinations in nature-study and know nothing. They haven't been out of doors to study. They haven't really had their interest encouraged. They do not know the families of trees, plants, birds, insects, etc. There is nothing easier to teach a child than this particular field.

The aesthetic and scientific side should be accentuated, and the economic and practical side reduced.

George Stone of our city in making moving pictures has gone into the scientific side of that work. He has made two films. The "Origin of Life" teaches these problems in a way that any child can understand and learn. It is wonderful, beautiful, and it offers safety and security. It was used by the United States government, but we haven't yet awakened to it right here in Berkeley. It is of immense value in the teaching of nature-study, in a way to fascinate any child.

Such comments are stimulating to teachers, particularly since the committee was well aware of the fact that the children of the last speaker are ardent nature-lovers resulting in their having rare knowledge of plants and animals and their habits.

The commissioner of parks made this suggestion:

It should be endeavored to bring out and develop in children the most important spirit that they may appreciate their public buildings, art, etc. There has been considerable trouble with boys in destroying park property, plants, etc. If they understood the trouble to raise plants, they would appreciate them more.

It is remarkable to see the public pride displayed by boys of other countries, particularly France. They know the whole history of their statues, etc. It would be a boy who would take a person to task who destroyed a tree or anything.

It is true that the boys of our best families, of people who live in our best districts, are most destructive. School children should know all about these

things so that they would learn to appreciate. They are the ones who could help with the problem of beginning our public parks. It is not so much the products of the parks that are of value but the creating in the children of the love of plants so that they won't destroy. They should learn that trees, etc., are just like human beings—they don't want to be hurt or destroyed.

In a number of instances the discussion showed that some of our most capable and intelligent citizens were not acquainted with the extensive provision made in every building in the city for individual differences in ability among children. It was not difficult to interest the group in the attitude of the schools and their definite achievements along this line so near to the hearts and understanding of those who believe that every child should be given the best opportunity for success that it is possible to give him. This came out in the discussion of arithmetic.

I had not had time to look over the course thoroughly, but I am favorably impressed and think it is practical and useful. Arithmetic is a practical subject affecting banking and every other avenue of life.

I think there ought to be some provision made for the slow pupil. Every class, particularly the arithmetic class, has slow pupils. There are always a number of youngsters in the arithmetic class who cannot keep up with the leaders. The tendency of the teacher is to have the class progress in relation to the most advanced pupils. The slow youngster gets so far behind that he is finally lost and has to drop into a lower grade. Another feature is the tendency to guess. One employee of our bank had such and such a thing given him and was asked what the balance was. He would say, for instance, \$585.00, and then look it up to see how near he came to it. It finally caused his withdrawal from the bank because he could not stay on that basis.

It seems, in my opinion, that some of the grades advance the children a little too rapidly, but I can see by the work of my youngsters that they are better qualified today to take up the practical values than most of us were at the same age. The main thing that I want to point out is taking care of the slow pupil. The youngster who is backward in school is the one to look out for. He is the one who is entitled to the attention of the teacher. The class is usually advanced according to the bright pupil.

The chief point I want to make regarding this course is the provision for the backward child because I feel that he is the one who really needs the attention.

Here was an excellent opportunity for the chairman to explain the general policy regarding these pupils, the service being rendered by the research department in analyzing pupil abilities and characteristics, and the specific provisions for meeting their needs.

It promises well for community interest in and understanding of the schools when patrons and teachers can get together and discuss such large problems of education.

One patron who spoke in connection with the discussion of the geography course of study had a big message for teachers which is just hinted at in the following quotation:

In the first place, I believe that geography ought to be approached from the child's point of interest. The basic thing of all study is love; bring the child to love the trees and hills and arouse his curiosity. We have what is called the Cosmopolitan Club at the University of California. The University of California has attracted more men and women from all parts of the world since the war than any other university in the United States. There are several hundred men and women from Japan, China, India, Roumania, Central and South America, and many less known parts of the world.

There is a Mexican boy going to the University of California who is about nineteen years old and is supporting two brothers while going through college. You can't hear him talk without feeling that we have misjudged Mexico. He says the people of Mexico are lovers of peace and are a quiet people, while the people in this country are lovers of getting ahead. He says that there are things they can learn from us, but that we can learn something of the joys of life from the Mexicans.

The main values of these conferences have been summarized. One further point may be mentioned. The conferences had the quality of stimulation which should characterize every educational activity. They did not end in themselves but resulted in a whole train of other activities of a constructive, positive, wholesome sort.

Teachers and principals went back to their schools inspired by the appreciation and careful thinking given their problems by those whom they are serving. These business and professional men had a definite basis for their discussion of the work of the public schools at rotary or commercial club, lodge, or luncheon. The progress and development of a democratic institution depend upon the belief of patrons in the fundamental principles which that institution is seeking to carry out.